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HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Fifty-third session

REPORT OF THE TWENTY-THIRD MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE (5 - 7 March 2002)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was opened by the Chairman of the Executive Committee, His Excellency, Ambassador Johan Molander (Sweden). His welcoming address included congratulations to Switzerland as the latest member of the United Nations. He informed the Committee of requests for observer status from Armenia, Burundi, Cambodia, Croatia, Estonia, Gabon, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Sierra Leone and Viet Nam. In accordance with the decision taken by the Executive Committee at its fifty-second session on observer participation (A/AC.96/959, para 29 (b)), the Standing Committee agreed to these requests.

2. The regional strategic presentations on (Asia and on CASWANAME) under agenda item 4 on programme and funding were chaired by His Excellency, Ambassador Fisseha Yimer (Ethiopia) Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE TWENTY-THIRD MEETING AND WORK PROGRAMME OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE IN 2002

3. The agenda for the meeting (EC/52/SC/CRP.1, Rev.1) was adopted. The Standing Committee's work programme for 2002, as discussed at the Planning Meeting of the Committee, held on 4 December 2001, was adopted without revision (EC/52/SC/CRP.2).

III. DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER'S STATEMENT

4. In an opening statement to the Committee, the Deputy High Commissioner outlined major developments since the Executive Committee's session in October last year. These had included the Ministerial Meeting of States Parties to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol in December, at which an important Declaration had been adopted. The focus would now be on the

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completion of the Global Consultations and preparation of an Agenda for Protection. She also drew attention to progress with respect to UNHCR's management, notably that of its human resources. Another priority being pursued was the development of a global strategy for the organization, building on the strategic reviews elaborated on a regional basis.

5. One delegation noted in response to this introductory statement that this was clearly a year of challenge. UNCHR's initial response to the Afghan crisis was appreciated but important work lay ahead. There was also deep concern over West Africa, a new item on the Committee's revised agenda. Beyond UNHCR's response, the situation called for the commitment of donors, especially to strengthen protection staff in the region.

IV. COORDINATION

6. The Head a.i. of Secretariat and Inter-Organization Service presented information paper EC/52/SCINF.1 containing an update on coordination issues. The inter-agency response to terrorism since September 11, as well as joint action on Afghanistan had figured prominently among coordination efforts of the past months, with some encouraging results. He also referred to recent developments with respect to senior-level inter-agency mechanisms, to bilateral cooperation with UNHCR's major partners, and to some recent initiatives by UNHCR concerning HIV/AIDS, and the results of an internal Task Force on partnerships that had examined how UNHCR worked with a cross-section of key partners within the United Nations system and beyond.

7. In a statement to the Committee, the Director of World Food Programme's Geneva Office described progress in redesigning the Memorandum of Understanding that served as basis of cooperation between the two organizations. He specified that WFP intended testing its new responsibility for the final distribution of basic food commodities in five countries over a 12-month period. Further attention needed to be given to practical arrangements for the supply of non-food items concomitantly with food items. WFP expected to provide additional support to UNHCR with respect to refugee registration and verification, nutritional surveillance programmes and gender advisers whose role was critical in view of the risks to women and girls in refugee situations. He also described joint efforts by the two organizations with respect to emergency training, staff security and resource mobilization, in collaboration with OCHA.

8. Many delegations welcomed the information provided under this agenda item, notably concerning UNHCR's participation in inter-agency and departmental bodies dealing with Afghanistan. One delegation asked UNHCR for a more analytical approach in future notes on coordination issues, assessing the usefulness of certain coordinating mechanisms and diverging views that may be held. Another delegation recommended that more attention should be given to regional bodies, notably in the context of new initiatives in Africa.

9. Several delegations noted with appreciation the active cooperation between UNHCR and WFP, qualified as an excellent example of evolving synergy between two organizations. One delegation called for close cooperation at the appropriate level to reinforce common policy and strategies. Another delegation deplored the shortfall facing WFP in 2002, and called for stronger donor support.

10. The creation of a joint UNHCR-IOM Action Group on Asylum and Migration resulting from the Global Consultations on International Protection was welcomed by a number of delegations, who asked to be kept regularly informed of its work. Two delegations asked for further clarification of its terms of

reference and wider distribution of the results of its work. Support was also expressed for the recent creation by UNHCR of an Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS, perceived as an issue deserving high priority by ExCom.

11. In a statement to the Committee the observer for the European Commission outlined several positive developments in relations between the Commission and UNHCR. They included joint identification with ECHO of areas of priority, the participation of the Department of Justice and Home Affairs in the examination of issues within the context of the Global Consultations on International Protection; and cooperation on country-specific programmes in Afghanistan, Colombia and elsewhere. Increased funding was being made available to assist women and children affected by armed conflicts as part of a doubling of the Commission's financial support to UNHCR.

12. Responding to specific enquires raised under this item, the Deputy High Commissioner explained that the new inter-agency network on security management was an entity for policy review at senior level. It was not intended to intervene at on operational level on a daily basis. The Head a.i. of Secretariat and Inter-Organisation Service provided further details of UNCHR's cooperation with IOM, and with the IDP Unit as well as the Military and Civil Defence Unit both operating under OCHA. He explained further that it was as yet too early to assess the effectiveness of the Integrated Mission Task Force on Afghanistan. With reference, lastly, to the work of the Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS, he specified that its draft strategy plan, once finalized, would be made available to ExCom at its next session.

V. PROGRAMME AND FUNDING

A. Update on programme and funding

13. The Director of the Division of Communication and Information (DCI) presented an update on programme and funding in 2001 and projections for 2002, contained in document EC/52/SC/CPR.3. He first expressed deep appreciation for the support provided to UNHCR in 2001, observing that insistent calls for more contributions in no way indicated a lack of recognition for the sustained support from a core group of major donors. The shortfall of 2001 had led to some reductions in budgets during the year, but last-minute cuts had been avoided and managers at field level had been able to take timely decisions. The Pledging Conference in Geneva in December 2001 had given encouraging results, allowing UNHCR to begin its programmes for 2002 with 20% more fresh contributions than in 2001. The outlook for the year was nevertheless alarming in view of the substantial Supplementary Programme budgets (notably Afghanistan) bringing overall requirements for the year to US$ 1,032.2 million. In order to meet these requirements, UNHCR was continuing its efforts to diversify its funding sources including the private sector. He also referred to the consultations currently underway within the Standing Committee on possible alternative funding mechanisms, under the leadership of the Chairman of the Executive Committee.

14. In their statements, delegations acknowledged the ongoing funding constraints faced by UNHCR. One delegation drew attention to the high level of private contributions in his own country and recommended that this model might be replicated elsewhere. Another delegation noted the importance of avoiding excessive earmarking, especially as the year progressed. One delegation emphasized the need for a better understanding of the implications of reduced budget levels, the priorities being applied as well as UNCHR's approach to funding the Supplementary Programmes. Full support was expressed by another delegation for the solutions-oriented focus of the High

Commissioner. This delegation also stressed the need to maintain trust by taking rapid action in response to the issues raised in West Africa. On the worrying issue of inadequate contributions, one delegation suggested the need for a thorough study of the causes. He also called for greater visibility of contributions by refugee-hosting countries. Another delegation requested that in-kind contributions should be shown separately from cash contributions.

15. In response to queries concerning budget levels, the Deputy High Commissioner explained that a two-tiered approach would be tested for the 2003 budget, identifying core needs and those that were subject to additional funding. The Director of DCI, also provided details of items appearing in the update document on which questions had been raised by delegations. They included expenditure on security, the Refugee Education Foundation, and other allocations from the Operational Reserve.

16. In conclusion of its examination of this item, the Committee adopted a decision, included in Annex I.

B. Regional reviews

(i) Africa

17. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa based his opening statement on the summary of strategic directions made available to delegations. He briefly described developments as well as prospects for durable solutions at the regional level. He then turned to the maintenance of standards in protection and assistance programmes in Africa. He highlighted the importance of addressing protracted refugee situations and stressed the link between protection and assistance, in particular underlining the impact of under-funding of the assistance programmes in Africa. Significant efforts needed to be made to improve the standards of assistance provided to refugees in order to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation, military recruitment, crime and other high-risk behaviour. Lastly the Director indicated that a number of changes were underway to implement the High Commissioner's decision to re-centralise certain aspects of the management of the Bureau for Africa's operations.

18. Many delegations, including some from governments hosting refugees, agreed that the link between protection and assistance was key, and focussed on the need for refugee programmes in Africa to receive adequate funding. In this respect, some delegations wanted to be kept informed about the implications of funding shortfalls and the effects of staffing cuts and office closures, including the re-centralization process.

19. Many delegations also spoke of the need to increase emphasis on protection, in particular physical protection and the protection of women and children. Increasing protection staff in the field was considered essential by a number of delegations. One delegation mentioned the importance of addressing HIV/AIDS in Africa.

20. On protracted refugee situations, many delegations asked about follow-up to the 14 December 2001 informal ministerial consultations on new approaches and partnerships for protection and solutions in Africa. In this respect, a number of delegations were looking forward to the outcome of the UNHCR/United Nations Office for Project Services joint mission to Zambia to look at refugee self-sufficiency and development in refugee-hosting areas of that country.

21. A number of delegations mentioned the importance of ensuring that the voluntary nature of refugee repatriation be respected. On the issue of repatriation from the United Republic of Tanzania to Burundi, two delegations said that the time was ripe for repatriation to Burundi to start. Other delegations expressed concern about the lack of consolidated peace in Burundi, the precarious nature of the security situation in much of the country, and the importance for refugees to have access to impartial information about the situation in their country. The Director of the Africa Bureau said that whilst UNHCR was committed to helping repatriate those refugees who expressed a well-informed wish to repatriate, the organization did not feel it was timely for large-scale repatriation to take place without a cease-fire and cessation of hostilities.

22. Some delegations stressed the need to address root causes of refugee flows and encouraged UNHCR to work with the Organization of African Unity on conflict resolution and conflict prevention. In the same vein, many delegations acknowledged the importance of adequate reintegration assistance for returnees in order to ensure sustainable repatriation. They also stressed the importance of stronger inter-agency co-operation to address the gap between humanitarian responses and development assistance.

23. A number of delegations acknowledged the importance of resettlement as a durable solution and supported the Kenya reform plan based on the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The Director, in his response to questions about resettlement, informed delegates that a continent-wide review of resettlement would be undertaken.

(ii) <u>The Americas</u>

24. The Chairman of the Executive Committee briefed the Standing Committee on his recent mission to Colombia and to Venezuela, sharing his concern over the invisibility on the national political agenda of the grave humanitarian situation of the internally displaced (IDPs), and drawing attention to the need for reinforced preventive and protection measures on their behalf. He welcomed the progress achieved in the legal and institutional framework to assist IDPs, but stressed the importance of its effective implementation. He urged the Government of Colombia to investigate and punish acts of violence perpetrated against civilians, and stressed the need for a negotiated peace.

25. The Chairman described the various visits he had made during his mission and paid tribute to the work undertaken by UNHCR, including the employment opportunities it had provided IDPs and its important coordinating role supported by OCHA. In responding to specific issues raised by delegations, the Chairman, recalled the extreme poverty affecting a large sector of the population and the lack of basic infrastructure or services particularly in urban areas, and stressed the need for massive investment in Colombia to redress social differences. His brief visit to Venezuela, had offered him the opportunity for discussions with the authorities that included the implementation of the so-called Organic Refugee law, the adoption of tripartite mechanisms involving Colombia, the need for increased border monitoring and cooperation on contingency planning.

26. In her introductory statement, the Director of the Bureau for the Americas described as main challenges the strengthening of the legal protection framework in the region, countering restrictive measures that threatened asylum standards, and addressing the displacement crisis in Colombia. Recent, encouraging events included the accession to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol of St. Kitts and Nevis, the establishment of an eligibility commission in Mexico, preparation of a contingency plan for

countries bordering Colombia, the introduction of the resettlement programme in Brazil, and the granting of naturalization and land titles to former Guatemalan refugees. She drew attention at the same time to the need to reinforce preventive and protection measures for IDPs in Colombia, to increase international presence in the country, and ensure continued involvement of refugee and IDP women in decisions affecting their lives. Partnership was also central to these essential protection objectives.

27. In the discussion that followed, several delegations voiced their concerns over recent developments in Colombia and its consequences on the humanitarian and displacement crisis. They commended UNHCR for its important work in favour of IDPs and expressed appreciation for the establishment of contingency plans for countries bordering Colombia and for the development of a Humanitarian Plan of Action in Colombia. Several delegations recognised the attention given to partnerships and welcomed the close co-ordination among United Nations agencies in Colombia, under UNHCR's leaderships. On funding for the Colombia special operation, several delegations reaffirmed their commitment and support. One delegation regretted that the opening of the fourth UNHCR office in Colombia would not be feasible because of funding difficulties. Another delegation urged other United Nations agencies to increase their presence outside the capital.

28. One delegation praised UNHCR for developing a system of honorary liaison officers in the Caribbean countries and hoped this would be continued and reinforced. This delegation also expressed support to emerging resettlement countries and offered assistance through twinning mechanisms.

29. An observer delegation speaking on behalf of NGOs highlighted the challenges facing UNHCR in the region, such as the situation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, asylum conditions in Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela and the deteriorating displacement situation in Colombia. Referring to the situation of Colombian refugees and asylum-seekers, this delegation called for the adoption of national legislation in accordance with international standards.

30. Responding to specific issues raised in the discussions, the Director welcomed the signing of an agreement between Haiti and the Dominican Republic to provide documentation to their nationals residing in the other country. She announced the Bureau's intention to review the honorary liaison officers and protection networks in the Caribbean: the results would be shared with interested countries. On resettlement, she welcomed the decision by the traditional resettlement countries to maintain their quotas and the support to emerging resettlement countries in the form of twinning arrangements. An evaluation of the IDP programme in Colombia would also be carried out during the year, as foreseen at the beginning of the programme three years ago. In view of a possible deterioration of the humanitarian crisis, monitoring of the border - both in Colombia and in neighbouring countries - would be stepped up and regular updates on contingency planning and on the Humanitarian Plan of Action in Colombia would be provided to member States.

(iii) Asia and the Pacific

31. In a brief update on recent developments of the Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, the Director mentioned a recent high-level mission to East Timor to review the phase-down of operations; UNHCR's participation in a conference on people smuggling, trafficking and related trans-national crime in Bali convened by the Governments of Australia and Indonesia; and the urgent need

to put back on track a tripartite agreement for the repatriation of Vietnamese Montagnards from Cambodia.

32. Many delegations expressed support for UNHCR activities in the region. Particular attention was given to efforts on behalf of the Montagnards and the implementation of the tripartite agreement. One delegation complimented UNHCR for improving the quality of asylum in the region and its attempts to gain access to places of origin to pursue solutions for 110,000 Myanmarese refugees in Thailand. Other issues raised by delegations included the necessity of a measured scaling-down of operations in East Timor and in Myanmar's Northern Rakhine State. Delegations concurred with the need to bring operations in Bangladesh on behalf of 21,000 Muslim refugees from Myanmar to a conclusion after ten years. Appreciation was expressed for UNHCR's continuing efforts in Sri Lanka and for the intention to appoint a region-based gender co-ordinator. UNHCR was requested to continue promoting solutions for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and to ensure that Tibetans in Nepal received adequate protection. Delegations were unanimous in commending UNHCR for participating in the Bali conference and for furthering the Asia-Pacific Consultations (APC) process.

33. An observer delegation representing NGOs noted that repatriation operations should be sustainable processes, meeting the needs of returnees as well as those of receiving communities. States in the region were encouraged to accede to the 1951 Convention. Concern was voiced about recourse by some States to mandatory or prolonged detention of refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly children and other vulnerable persons.

34. In his concluding remarks, the Director expressed appreciation for the support UNHCR's efforts to promote solutions for Myanmarese refugees in Thailand. With regard to the remaining refugees in Bangladesh, the Myanmar Government's decision to re-start and facilitate repatriation was particularly appreciated. He confirmed that UNHCR would not be able to sustain previous levels of assistance in Northern Rakhine State, but would continue to provide coordinating support to implementing partners while advising them to seek direct funding for their activities. In East Timor, the Office would pursue a policy of cautious disengagement, retaining a repatriation and protection monitoring presence beyond mid-2002. On the issue of the Vietnamese Montagnards, the Director acknowledged widespread support for the implementation of the tripartite agreement. He observed that allegations that UNHCR was involved in smuggling Montagnards into Cambodia were absurd, irresponsible and dangerous. He added that Viet Nam had called for an informal tripartite meeting on 12 March 2002, and it was hoped that the meeting would serve to revitalize the agreement.

(iv) Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East (CASWANAME)

35. In his introductory statement, the Director of the Regional Bureau for CASWANAME referred to the impact of the events following 11 September 2001, notably the military conflict in Afghanistan and regional contingency preparedness. The ensuing events in Afghanistan had then given rise to an unprecedented opportunity for the return home of large numbers of Afghans. The Bureau's main objective were to strengthen asylum and expand protection space, seek and implement durable solutions, foster political and financial support for UNHCR's activities and maintain a continued high level of emergency preparedness in the region

36. In the discussion that followed many delegations expressed satisfaction with UNHCR's action so far in response to the Afghan crisis, but urged that

assistance needs in countries of asylum should not be overlooked in favour of the repatriation and re-integration operation, especially as security in Afghanistan continued to be precarious. One delegation cautioned that assuming too great a role vis-à-vis internally displaced persons in Afghanistan could have global coordination implications and draw UNHCR's limited resources away from countries of asylum. UNHCR's efforts to conclude tri-partite agreements with countries of asylum were specifically applauded, as was its intention to promote the rehabilitation of refugee-impacted areas, particularly in Pakistan and in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in partnership with the United Nations agencies. Some delegations asked for further analysis of the refugee caseload, their desired durable solutions, an assessment as to continued protection needs preventing return, as well as further information on return areas in Afghanistan.

37. Several delegations requested UNHCR to define more clearly its coordination role with the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA), United Nations agencies and other international organizations, including ICRC and IOM. Two other delegations urged prompt support to the AIA, while others asked for more details of UNHCR's return plan. Two delegations raised queries as to the feasibility of the projected large-scale return and its operational budget, especially in view of limited security and infrastructure. Specific details were also requested of projected phased budget requirements and expenditures thus far.

38. Numerous delegations emphasized the need for regional emergency preparedness, partnerships and coordination and to continue to promote international burden-sharing with hosting countries. One delegation urged UNHCR to re-examine its objectives to provide a mutually supportive framework to respond to the growing number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt. Some Delegations also urged stronger donor response to the food needs of Saharan refugees.

39. The observer delegation representing the NGOs noted that more than 30% of all the world's refugees were accommodated in countries covered by the CASWANAME Bureau. He called upon UNHCR to guarantee protection to Palestinian refugees falling under its mandate. He expressed concern that asylum standards were threatened by prevailing action against terrorism, that could specifically affect refugees hosted by and originating from CASWANAME countries. He made particular mention of the need to safeguard freedom of movement, rescue at sea and the protection of refugees wherever they may be.

40. Responding to a question about UNHCR's action in the context of the Afghan crisis, the Director confirmed that a survey of the refugee caseload would be available shortly and contribute to a regional database to be shared with the AIA and with other Untied Nations agencies as contribution to their immediate, intermediate and longer-term strategies, with particular focus on returnee women and children. He reaffirmed UNHCR's commitment to mobilize support to rehabilitate refugee-impacted areas in neighbouring countries, and called upon all hosting countries to work within a coordinated framework designed to avoid overwhelming the limited absorption capacity in Afghanistan. He also confirmed that discussions on the tri-partite agreement were progressing satisfactorily.

41. As regards internally displaced persons, the Director gave details of UNHCR's contribution to the functions coordinated by OCHA. Moreover, UNHCR was looking to the overall leadership role of the recently appointed Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for humanitarian assistance and development. Moreover, UNHCR was about to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with IOM clarifying their respective roles. Lastly, he

explained that the operational budget for Afghanistan had covered a period that included the end of one fiscal year (2001) creating a carry-over into the fiscal year (2002), midway in project implementation. Of the planned 500 staff (including national staff), nearly 300 were already at work. This number included nearly 70 internationals, giving UNHCR a strong capacity in Afghanistan, despite some security concerns.

42. Following a lengthy exchange on the question of Western Sahara, the Chairman highlighted the importance of this issue and expressed hope that recent recommendations would be a cornerstone for lasting solutions.

(v) Europe

43. The out-going Director of the Bureau for Europe introduced this regional review by emphasizing that UNHCR's presence and programmes in Europe were focussed on solution-oriented protection of refugees and displaced persons both in Europe and globally. While all European States but one were now party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol, challenges remained in the implementation of these instruments. UNHCR's main protection objectives were to ensure that persons in need of international protection had access to the territories of European States and to fair, efficient and effective asylum procedures; that sustained efforts were made to render public opinion receptive and supportive of the protection and solutions needs of refugees; particularly in view of negative effects of the September 11 terrorist attacks and to ensure respect for refugee rights and effective durable solutions.

44. He drew attention to the need to support initiatives that facilitate local integration, particularly in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, where such opportunities were limited. In cases where voluntary repatriation was the favoured durable solution, UNHCR would promote the return of refugees and internally displaced only when conditions were conducive to return, and provide active support to their social and economic integration. UNHCR also continued to solicit the support of European countries for durable solutions in other regions of the world, through flexible and expanded resettlement programmes and through financial assistance to help refugees in countries of first asylum.

45. In their interventions, several delegations acknowledged the importance of the protection challenges in Europe and UNHCR's role in this respect. Some referred specifically to UNHCR's advocacy efforts with the general public, insisting not to lose sight of the need to humanitarian considerations in the face of recent security concerns. Two delegations however, encouraged UNHCR to evaluate its representation in Western Europe and consider regionalization as a cost-saving measure. The NGO-observer delegation called for solidarity towards persons in need of protection and stressed the importance of the on-going process of asylum harmonization in the European Union, warning that the standards set would have global policy implications.

46. One delegation noted that Central Europe had had to deal with increasing numbers of asylum-seekers and that investments in asylum systems must continue within the framework of accession to the European Union, in order to that States obligations under the 1951 Convention would be fulfilled. Referring to the situation in the Northern Caucasus, one delegation expressed appreciation for UNHCR's programmes in the Russian Federation, confirming the voluntary nature of any returns to Chechnya. Another delegation observed that the situation of IDPs in this area would only improve if a political solution was found and expressed appreciation for UNHCR's work in difficult conditions. This delegation also encouraged UNHCR's continued coordination

within the framework of the CIS Conference follow-up, and expressed support for UNHCR's programmes in Southern Caucasus.

47. Regarding UNHCR's programmes in South-Eastern Europe, one delegation recognized the timeliness of phase-down strategies in countries affected by the Dayton Peace Agreement (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). Another delegation, however, expressed concern over the low rate of return of internally displaced persons to Kosovo, and encouraged the international community to increase its efforts to improve the security situation in the province.

48. Responding to the various issues raised by delegations, the Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe explained that UNHCR's presence in Western Europe must be maintained during the current negotiations towards harmonization of asylum systems within the European Union. UNHCR would reconsider its office structure in Western Europe upon implementation of the Amsterdam Treaty, scheduled for 2004. UNHCR's advocacy efforts also sought to increase support for asylum system development in Central Europe, to strengthen local NGOs, and to raise public awareness of the plight and rights of refugees.

49. With respect to the situation in and around Chechnya, the Director confirmed that, while It was hoped that conditions conducive to return would be established, neither UNHCR nor the internally displaced persons themselves felt that return to Chechnya would be sustainable and safe at the present time. UNHCR would meanwhile promote temporary integration and increased self-sufficiency to avoid that more winters were spent in tented camps. He also paid tribute to countries in the Southern Caucasus for bearing the burden of internal displacements and refugee caseloads; UNHCR would continue to work in the sub-region in pursuit of durable solutions. Lastly, he expressed appreciation for the expanding work of NGOs in countries of Eastern Europe, as well as efforts in Central Europe to deal with increasing numbers of asylum-seekers. The challenges of integration, however, remained and required the active engagement of the European Commission and of Western European countries.

VI. MANAGEMENT (West Africa)

50. The Chairman recalled that this additional item had been added at the request of several delegations who had attended the briefing given by the Deputy High Commissioner on 1 March 2002. It concerned the allegations of sexual violence and exploitation of refugee children in camps in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, revealed by a joint mission undertaken in 2001 by UNHCR and Save the Children-UK.

51. The item was introduced by the High Commissioner who explained the background to the joint mission as well as UNHCR's immediate response at various levels, including the launching of an investigation by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Service. He explained how the leaking to the media of an earlier version of the full report of the mission had led to the release of a summary to UNHCR's implementing partners. He reiterated that there would be "zero-tolerance" for perpetrators of such abuse. He also emphasized that inadequacy of resources was an important factor in the increased vulnerability of refugees, and that "sending doctors without medicine" would not be a solution.

52. In the course of the ensuing debate, deep shock was expressed by all delegations. While acknowledging the High Commissioner's explanations concerning the circumstances of the media reports, many felt strongly that

they should have been advised at an earlier stage. A large number drew attention to the issues of responsibility. It was important that managers should be held accountable and that sanctions be applied. Many also expressed the fear that the problem could be more widespread than in West Africa. They urged UNHCR to ensure that enquires included other regions and actions and that preventive measures be applied across the board. Several also pointed to the need to give refugees the chance to speak out as their voices mattered most.

53. Many delegations drew attention to the fact that the problem was one that concerned the entire international community, as a shared responsibility. Some also drew attention to issues of inadequacy of funding, including food supplies. Several delegations raised the question of staffing, notably protection, community services and the need for more female staff. Some also drew attention to the need to address the needs of victims as a matter of priority and a few offered assistance including qualified human resources. Several delegations expressed concern that these allegations could discredit the humanitarian work being undertaken in the region and elsewhere, emphasizing that it was important to restore confidence.

54. Several types of action were requested: immediate measures to improve the physical security of women and girls and bring those guilty to justice; a code of conduct and accountability mechanisms; compensation for victims and appropriate care; increased protection and community services staff, including more female staff. There was a unanimous call for regular sharing of information and a detailed chronology of events. The forthcoming Global Consultations should provide an opportunity for fuller discussion of this essential protection issue. Many delegations also expressed their continuing confidence in UNHCR and support for its work.

55. In conclusion of this item, the Chairman insisted on the need for continued transparency and flow of information, notably through the Global Consultations in May and the examination of the Agenda for Protection at the Standing Committee's next meeting in June. He echoed the High Commissioner's call to focus on prevention. This was a shared responsibility for the international community, of which adequate funding was one aspect.

VII. STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE UNHCR STAFF COUNCIL

56. In the course of the meeting, the chairperson of the UNHCR Staff Council delivered a statement in which he deplored the disturbing allegations coming from West Africa and stressed that staff and management needed to work together to lift the organization out of this crisis. Among other main issues of current concern, he also referred to the challenge of the staffing requirements for the Afghan operation. In conclusion, he outlined a range of outstanding human resources polices on which only modest progress had been made over recent months.

VIII. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

57. The Chairman reminded the Committee of the various resolutions that had been adopted under the item on UNHCR at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, They were as follows: A/RES/56/137 on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ("omnibus" resolution); A/RES/56/136 on Assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors; A/RES/56/135 on Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa; A/RES/56/134 on Follow-up to the CIS Regional Conference; and A/RES/56/133 on Enlargement of ExCom (to include Ecuador, Guinea New Zealand and Yugoslavia).

58. In a brief statement before the closing of the meeting, the Deputy High Commissioner mentioned that efforts were underway towards a global strategy for UNHCR. This would build on the regional strategies that had been discussed in the course of the meeting. She also recalled the High Commissioner's strong commitment to give the highest priority to action in addressing the management issues arising from the report on West Africa. She drew attention, finally to the urgent need to meet the projected shortfall of US$ 100 million: any additional funding efforts for non-core activities should not detract from the Annual Programme requirements.

59. The Chairman then declared the closure of the Standing Committee's twenty-third meeting.

Annex

DECISION ON OVERALL PROGRAMME AND FUNDING IN 2001 AND PROJECTIONS FOR 2002

The Standing Committee,

1. *Recalling* the Executive Committee's decision at its fifty-second session on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/950 para. 15) as well as its discussions under item 4(i) at the twenty-third meeting of the Standing Committee;

2. *Recalling also* the consultations on funding mechanisms held on 30 November 2001, in application of the decision reached at the Standing Committee's twenty-first meeting (A/AC.96/956 Annex I/A);

3 *Reaffirms* its continued support for efforts by the High Commissioner to review priorities and funding mechanisms and records its appreciation of being kept regularly informed of progress made, with a view to a substantive and transparent discussion of the budget prior to its adoption by the Executive Committee;

4. *Notes* that UNHCR's overall needs for 2002, based on currently known requirements, amount to US$ 828.6 million, as approved by the Executive Committee at its fifty-second session (which includes the amount of $ 19.9 million from the United Nations Regular Budget and $ 7 million for Junior Professional Officers), and an additional $ 203.6 million for six supplementary programmes;

5. *Recalls* that the Pledging Conference held on 3 December 2001, yielded a total of $ 266.9 million in pledges and notes that this was an encouraging achievement for this Conference, held for the first time in Geneva;

6 *Emphasises* the importance of adequate, early and predicable funding for UNHCR's programmes on the part of the international community, so as to avoid the introduction of austerity measures, including the imposition of limits on obligation levels for programmes in the latter part of the year, and hence the need for a firm indication of pledges by mid-2002;

7 *Acknowledges* with appreciation the burden shouldered by developing and least developed countries hosting refugees, and recommends that further consultations be undertaken to quantify and reflect such burdens appropriately in UNHCR's documentation;

8. *Encourages* governments to ensure that in formulating their national budgets sufficient resources are allocated as contributions to UNHCR to enable the Office to fulfil its mandate.